

WHAT IS OSL?

We design fashion and technology for people with disabilities.

Our Mission

For all people to have access to style, regardless of cognitive & physical ability. We work to achieve this through education, research, and innovation.

How We Work

To achieve our mission as a nonprofit organization, we focus on three activities: (1) raise awareness in creating designs that socially integrate disabled people; (2) provide an educational program that invites multi-disciplinary teams to co-design with people with disabilities; and (3) distribute the knowledge we gain to equip communities with the tools to make accessible designs. Since 2016, OSL collaborated with Parsons School of Design, to successfully piloted an elective course while still offering our summer program to people outside the institution. We bring together teams of fashion designers, engineers, rehabilitative professionals, and people with disabilities (PWD) to create stylish wearables and tech that tackle various disability challenges. What makes our production process unique versus the current fashion market, which frequently excludes PWD, is that our target clientele always plays an integral part in the creation process. From start to finish, disabled clients serve as hands-on consultants to ensure that pieces are truly tailored to the individual's style and needs.

In addition to our design operations, we conduct and compile accessible design research, which serves as a valuable resource for manufacturers of like products. OSL also provides more in-depth consultations for brands and business looking to update their businesses with a more inclusive mindset, not just with individual products but also with the shopping experience at large.

Our Design Process

We team designers, engineers, and physical and occupational therapists with a client who has a physical disability. Through a human-centered design approach, the client remains a core participant throughout the course of the term. Work begins as clients educate teams regarding their disability and specific needs, not just through interviews but also via shadowing clients throughout their daily lives, at home, work, and out and about in their local communities. From there, teams begin to brainstorm wearable solutions and create multiple prototypes, which they test every step of the way with clients. Projects culminate in a final presentation and a usable product that clients can keep.

Company Facts

Date Founded: 2014

Location: New York

Members: Grace Jun (Executive Director and board member), Pinar Guvenc (board member), Christina Mallon (board member) with 4 advisors and 3 contractors.

garments/devices created to date: 30

clients served: 30 with whom we've created wearable solutions for their unique disability-related needs. But we also serve the disability community at large through our events (including presentations, workshops, and panels) and ongoing efforts to raise awareness about inclusive design. We also strive to provide employment for people with disabilities; to wit, several of our team members are past clients and/or identify as having a disability.

students and fellows who have enrolled in OSL programs: Approximately 140 across our summer fellowship and OSL course offered through Parsons. We've also seen participation by more than 100 individuals at workshops held worldwide in countries including Korea, Thailand, and Hong Kong.

Brief History:

OSL was founded in 2014 as a collaborative, interdisciplinary program that addresses the lack of adaptive clothing in the current fashion marketplace. In its first iteration, the workshop invited eight clients with various disabilities to work with eight student teams, each comprised of an engineer, a designer, and an occupational therapist. Students came from schools including MIT, Harvard University, Tufts University, Boston University, the Rhode Island School of Design, and the Fashion Institute of Technology. Expert mentors — designers, engineers, and occupational therapists — provided guidance over the course of workshop.

In 2015, OSL obtained 501(c)(3) status. In the same year, it began to offer its summer fellowship, opening up its curriculum to working professionals in the fashion, technology, and healthcare industries. In 2016, OSL moved its operations to New York and began offering fall/spring classes with The New School, Parsons School of Design. OSL continues its fashion design and creation work, but has expanded its operations to offer consulting services to companies that are looking to adopt more accessible business models. It also actively builds relationships with underserved populations even among the disabled community like children and the elderly to continue ensuring that it serves all disabled individuals.

Examples of Past OSL Designs

*Designs below represent class work done in collaboration with Parsons; OSL does not own the rights to these creations. Contact press@openstylelab.org for photos.

DESIGNS CREATED AT SUMMER PROGRAM OR RESEARCH LAB

TEAM Q - QUEMUEL ARROYO

DISABILITY:

Q has sustained a T9-T10 incomplete spinal cord injury during an outdoor sporting accident. He uses a manual wheelchair.

GOAL:

An inclusive and stylish 2-piece rain solution providing superior water repellency, breathability, and portability for individuals on the go.

PRODUCT NAME:

qxGo (<https://vimeo.com/229387593>)

Fellowship Team:

Staci Chan (Occupational Therapist), Kailu Guan (Designer), Chengcheng Zhao (Engineer)

TEAM APRIL COUGHLIN

DISABILITY:

April has a T10 spinal cord injury at her thoracic spine. April's spinal cord injury has profoundly affected the function of her lower extremities but full functional mobility of her upper extremities.

GOAL:

Revolve, is a system designed to keep even the most extreme wheelers safe and protected during their city commute. The system includes a rain jacket and abrasion resistant glove guards.

PRODUCT NAME:

Revolve: "reimagining commuter gear for all abilities."
(<https://vimeo.com/229349636>)

Fellowship Team:

Kaitlin Crowther (Occupational Therapist), Maggie Mahoney (Designer), & Renata Gauí (Engineer)

DESIGNS CREATED AS A CLASS OFFERED BY THE NEW SCHOOL, PARSONS

TEAM CHRISTINA MALLON

DISABILITY:

Christina has a form of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) called flail arm syndrome and cannot move her hands nor arms.

GOAL:

To design a coat that Christina is able to don and off independently in a variety of settings, without the use of assistive devices.

PRODUCT NAME:

Unparalled (<https://vimeo.com/216125010>)

Student Team:

Estee Bruno, MFA Design & Technology
Claudia Poh, BFA Fashion
Julia Liao, BFA Product Design

TEAM DOUGLAS BALDER

DISABILITY:

Spinal cord compression and bone pain have made Douglas' spinal column curve inward and compress itself, causing pain and fatigue that limit his activities.

GOAL:

To create a back-wrap specific to Douglas' comfort and support needs, utilizing a rubber bag apparatus along with a foam tailored to his lower-back dimensions.

PRODUCT NAME:

Support Vest (<https://vimeo.com/216101882>)

Student Team:

Andrew Sapala, BFA Fine Arts
Pamela Cooper, BFA Fashion
Ying Xiao, MFA Design & Technology
Fanyun Peng, MFA Design & Technology

TEAM KIERAN KERN

DISABILITY:

Kieran Kern has spastic quad cerebral palsy (CP). In Kieran it presents with spastic muscles, a lurch and pivot gait, and limited range of motion. She uses a scooter to conserve energy and limit physical wear and tear.

GOAL: To create a stylish coat for easy don and dogg using a 3-D printed collar for leverage.

PRODUCT NAME:

Kieran Coat (<https://vimeo.com/215695933>; password: openstylelab)

Student Team:

Magdalena Kraszpulska, MFA Lighting
Noah Litvin, MFA Transdisciplinary Design
Tong Zhang, MFA Design & Technology
Xiaojie Yang, MFA Design & Technology

TEAM IRENE PARK

DISABILITY:

Irene suffered a spinal cord injury that rendered her a paraplegic, meaning she has no feeling nor movement from the waist down.

GOAL:

To create a pair of fashionable pants with easy catheter access to empower wheelchair users.

PRODUCT NAME:

Triforce (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IlecRhXV9ao>)

Student Team:

Alice Müller, BFA Fashion
Vishaal Ravikumar, MFA Design & Technology
Dian Rachmawati, MFA Design & Technology
Gunjan Raheja, MFA Design & Technology

Who is OSL?

Grace Jun: Executive Director

Grace is a designer and thought leader working at the intersection of universal design & fashionable technology. She is an Assistant Professor of Fashion at Parsons School of Design. Her latest work was displayed at the FIT Museum Body Exhibit in 2018. She has been asked to speak about disability and design in numerous settings, including Design Indaba 2017 recently Forbes. Prior to Parsons and Open Style Lab, Grace's design work can be seen in several of the early feature phones, smart phones, and wearable watches launched through Verizon or T-Mobile by Samsung Electronics. Her experience as a UX designer and design strategist at Samsung for five years has helped develop her research focus at OSL on the wearable experience and fashion technology products.

Christina Mallon: Digital Marketing

Christina is a digital marketer and disability advocate working to combine inclusivity within fashion and tech. She began experiencing hand weakness in spring 2010 that over six years progressed to complete paralysis in her arms & hands, believed to be the result of a rare form of ALS called Flail Arm Syndrome. As a disabled person in her field, Christina felt under-represented as both consumer and individual. But rather than feel discouraged, she recognized the opportunity to grow disability awareness and make a meaningful impact in building a more accessible society at large through OSL. Christina also works at digital agency POSSIBLE spearheading a new design thinking process geared towards inclusive design with clients like Tommy Hilfiger and Microsoft

Pinar Guvenc: Business Strategy

Pinar runs the gamut from economic incentives and grants real estate development, job creation and technology innovation, to functional furniture and clean tech innovation. After earning her BSc in Industrial Engineering (Bilkent University) and MSc in Economics & Finance (Southern Illinois University), Pinar worked at NY Grant Company on economic incentives and grants for real estate development, job creation and technology innovation. In 2013, she co-founded New York Functional Furniture – an e-commerce platform for functional furniture designed in NYC. Since early 2015, Pinar manages business operations and product commercialization efforts at Eray/Carbajo, an international architecture and design. She brings her experience in product development, overseeing production drawings, prototyping and cost engineering, as well as commercialization through licensing and strategic partnerships to OSL.

Past OSL Events

Museum of Science, Boston
Meet the Experts: IKEA, UNYQ, and Two Blind Brothers
SXSW 2018
Microsoft Panel
Construct 3D conference
M1 Buzzfeed by Digitas Health
3D industry - Barcelona
Avantex Paris
United Nations
WWW/ Fashion at Parsons School of Design
Museum of Science
MIT Museum
Makerfaire

Grants and Awards

Make It Knicks x Squarespace Award, 2018: \$30,000

The “Make It Fund” offered by partners Squarespace and the New York Knicks helps local entrepreneurs get off the ground. Open Style Lab received \$30,000 to help fund its 2018 Summer Program.

Christopher and Dana Reeve Foundation, Quality of Life Grant 2017-2018: \$12,500

Given to The New School, Parsons School of Design to collaborate with Open Style Lab on bringing our flagship program to campus and in New York for two summers.

United Spinal NYC Chapter, 2017-2018: \$2,500

Provided in support of OSL’s second year of classes offered at Parsons for class materials for students to build accessible clothing or wearable tech projects.

Paralyzed Veterans of America Grant, 2015: \$50,000

Paralyzed Veterans Research Foundation funds projects that seek better treatments and cures for and/or support efforts to improve the quality of life of individuals with paralysis stemming from spinal cord injury.

Press Coverage

PBS Channel 13

[Designing Accessible Fashion for People with Disabilities](#)

October 14, 2018

Vogue.com

[The Next Phase of Inclusive Fashion: Designing for the Disabled](#)

August 14, 2017

The New York Times

[Designing for All Abilities](#)

May 9, 2017

WNYC

[Adaptive Design Creates Fashion for Everyone](#)

February 16, 2018

BBC News

[The tech making fashion accessible for disabled people](#)

February 3, 2018

Papermag

[Aerie's Inclusive Ads Are What Fashion Needs](#)

July 12, 2018

CNBC

[This lab designed a coat for people who can't use their arms](#)

March 17, 2018

NBCNews.com

[Nonprofit Merges Hi-Tech and High Fashion to Make Clothes for People with Disabilities](#)

September 14, 2017

Refinery29

[Why Some Of The Country's Best & Brightest Spent The Summer Designing Clothes](#)

August 26, 2016

FAQ

What kinds of garments has OSL created?

To give a few examples, we've designed coats that can be put on and taken off independently by individuals with limited arm mobility, pants and skirts that aid in toileting needs for the mobility-impaired, raincoats for wheelchair users (who need both hands to operate their chairs and can't use an umbrella), inflatable vests that increase the comfort of people with back pain, and suits cut specifically to various mobility devices.

How has OSL extended beyond fashion design?

The first thing to note is that while all the inventions we design and produce are both functional and stylish, they are not limited to clothing. In addition to our fashion work, OSL also does extensive work in research and development, looking for ways to use new technologies and build designs that exist in that space between fashion, tech and health.

What sorts of disabilities have the clients you've worked with had?

Our clients include but are certainly not limited to people with Spinal Cord Injury, Cerebral Palsy, and Muscular Dystrophy, as well as amputees and the elderly.

Is fashion really that important for navigating life with a disability?

Of course! Clothing is a critical social tool for leading a fulfilling life. Individuals with physical disabilities often need clothing that addresses their unique physical form and functional needs. But products often don't work as intended and don't look good. Manufacturers also tend to address disability needs as imagined by able-bodied designers, not reflective of customers' actual needs. As such, a lack of meaningful clothing options through the existing fashion marketplace actively hinders people with disabilities from fully integrating into society.

Working collaboratively with our disabled clientele, OSL creates innovative wearable solutions that meet the actual needs of people with disabilities, in function and in style. This gives clients the independence, freedom, and confidence they need to more wholly integrate into their communities. We also provide consultation and rapid prototyping for leading companies in health, tech, and design to help them visualize their own universally designed products.

What happens to your clients after you work with them?

We maintain close relationships with past clients — many of whom are now core members of our current team — receiving regular feedback about the

long-term durability of their designed products and what can be improved going forward. Many of these individuals also return to OSL as consultants for new client work and businesses seeking to improve their inclusive services, as well as to represent at OSL panels and events.

What else are you doing to further the cause for people with disabilities?

We actively advocate on behalf of people with disabilities, speaking on inclusion and accessibility issues at events including SXSW and various Parsons School of Design panels, and consulting for corporate businesses on how to make the shopping journey more accessible. We also employ several people with disabilities, many of them past clients of the OSL program, and continue recruiting for talented individuals, both with and without disabilities, as long as they are interested in serving this population.

How do OSL's innovations connect to larger societal issues?

In the U.S., one out of five people identify as having a disability. In fact, the disabled community is larger than even the considerable Hispanic community in the U.S. and represents a collective spending power of \$365 billion. It's also the only minority group that nearly everyone will be a part of at some point in his or her life. Yet, there are few companies that adequately address their accessibility needs, least of all those of the sartorial variety, if at all. In addition, this population is often lumped into one group, without consideration for the unique conditions and needs of the individuals. In contrast, our approach is to dive in-depth with individual case studies, working in a cross-disciplinary with not only designers, but also engineers and healthcare professionals to get a full picture of each of our clients' life experiences and needs.

By bringing our clients' stories to light, we are showing companies that people with disabilities are worth their attention and also how they can go about serving this population. Because ultimately, OSL's work is about empowering people with disabilities. By coming up with wearable solutions that enable users to accomplish their life goals, perform at optimal levels, and above all feel that what they are wearing fully expresses who they are, we are creating a space for them, a space where they can comfortably share their stories and feel valued. Helping our clients lead more fulfilling, independent lives is also the type of grassroots advocacy that is often even more effective than grand-scale efforts to raise awareness about people with disabilities.

What recent innovations have you achieved to advance your mission?

We designed garments and wearable technologies for people with disabilities related to congenital and injury-related conditions. In 2018, we added aging to that list, serving senior clients who are patients of The Riverside Premier Rehabilitation & Healing Center in New York City. We're also making great

strides in building out our research and development database. We are specifically breaking ground in (1) accessible clothing design through digital pattern making; (2) forging even closer relationships with the disability community through human-centric design methods through educational programs; and (3) innovative web design that better shares our stories and makes our R&D accessible to more people.

We have witnessed the impact of our awareness-raising efforts first and foremost with the exponential increase in online traffic and event attendance generated by our digital campaigns and summer program shows. To wit, we've seen a 50% increase in web traffic year compared to last year. In addition, our Summer Fellowship this year boasts the largest group of participants we've ever had for this program, 21 fellows compared to 12 last year. We also had the honor this year of speaking at major events like SXSW and Possible's "Inclusion Revolution" panel to raise awareness about disability issues across all industries. Finally, we consulted for IKEA and Macy's, providing advice that will have a real, positive impact on retail shopping experiences for 40 million Americans with a disability.

How do you measure the positive impact your innovations have had on your industry and society at large?

Storytelling is always first and foremost. Our clients share via in-person presentations, our website, and our social media on an ongoing basis how our garments continue to change their lives. In addition, an increasing number of media outlets (including the New York Times, Vogue, Forbes, and CNBC) have been spreading the word about our efforts to the greater public. We also regularly participate in events (such as WWW/Fashion "What's Wrong With Fashion?" at Parsons School of Design and tech presentations at the Boston Museum of Science) throughout the year, inviting more and more people to engage with our work. Visitors who experience our prototypes almost always leave much more educated about the topic of accessible design and feel encouraged to rethink their respective industries through this lens.

Finally, we regularly collaborate with outside organizations including MIT Age Lab and Museum of Science Boston to conduct surveys regarding accessible clothing availability and dressing barriers for people with disabilities. We specifically tailor our operations to the responses to these surveys, making us confident in our ability to demonstrate just how much of a critical need innovative design is in this space.

OSL Press Contact

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